



Lotha Naga Folktale of a Girl who married to a Tiger: Folklores and Folktales, a key in understanding Culture and Society

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Abstract

This paper intends to evaluate the Lotha Nagas social system based on the idioms contained in Lotha Nagas Lore and Tales. It distinguishes folklore in relation to the culture of the Lothas. It will examine how folklore and tales offer philosophical insights into the culture and society of the Lotha Nagas. It also attempts to bring forth folktales and lores as an important part of the incarnated aspects of the Lotha Naga culture. Therefore to comprehend the Lotha Culture and Society, it is essential to study its various socio- cultural ethos, festivals and ceremonies which is unique to their culture. Folktales and lores are the instruments of education into a culture of the feelings in which a person's response to life's challenges will be based.

I. INTRODUCTION

As history proves every human fact occurring at places, and occasions, folklores and folktales continue to carry a lot of weight and evidences that has genuine historical records. Our attempt here is to define what is really meant by folklore and folktale, interpret, draw moral teachings, and make a remark of the stories in order to enhance our concern in the tribal world. Like any other tribal's in India, the Lotha Nagas have their own rich cultural heritage preserved in the form of oral traditions and artifacts. The Lotha Nagas area abounds with rich oral tradition which includes folktales and lores, local myths and traditions related to the local history, landforms and names of places. These oral traditions have been a source of value education as well as an entertainment in traditional rural societies, and they hold the essence of rich culture and traditions.

II. LOTH NAGA FOLKTALE OF A GIRL WHO MARRIED TO A TIGER

One day a woman went down to her field to collect some vegetables. On the way, she saw a fine gourd and tried to

pick it, and then a tiger saw her and said, "That is my gourd, why are you going to pick it? I will kill you if you do so." And it caught her. But the woman who was pregnant said, "Do not kill me; I will give you my baby when it is born." So, the tiger let her go. In due time, a daughter was born. Routinely the tiger asked the woman if her child was born yet, till at last, she told the tiger that it had already been born. Soon the tiger asked her if her daughter was strong enough to fetch firewood and water, and was old enough to get married. But the woman told that her daughter was not yet old enough to do so till she realized that she must keep her word and admitted that the girl was old enough. As the woman set weaving cloth for her daughter on her wedding day, she was greatly upset and her tears fell fast on the cloth when she thought that her child would surely be killed and will be eaten. The same feeling happened with the husband as he worked at the basket for his daughter, his tears fell fast on the basket. When the girl saw it, she asked her mother why she is crying. She replied "I poked myself in the eye with my bobbin" then asked her father and he responded, "I poked myself in the eye with a slip of bamboo." Then the day came, her parents gave her to the tiger in marriage.

A year later, a baby girl was born to the couple. When her mother carried the baby, she never cried but when her father carried her, she cried all the time. His wife asked the tiger, "Why do you make our daughter cry all the time?" The tiger replied, "It is because my beard pricks her." So one day her mother decided to hide and watch what was happening, and to her surprise she saw the tiger knock his little daughter's head *tap, tap* against a hard stone and lick up the blood which dripped down. When she saw this, she was determined to leave, and said to her husband, "I am going to fetch some firewood, so hold the baby till I come back," but the tiger said, "I am coming too." Whenever she asked about fetching water or firewood, the tiger always replied that he would accompany her. At last, she asked him to look after the child so that she could go down to the spring to wash their clothes. Saying so, she went down to the spring and set a *louse* and a *flea* to wash the clothes, *Chuck chuck, chuck*,¹ and took the opportunity to flee to her parent's house. The tiger thought that the noise made by the louse and flea was his wife washing the clothes, so he kept calling, "The baby is crying, come up and nurse her." After some time, he came down to look for her, and to his surprise, his wife was gone and found out that the *louse* and *flea* was making the sound. So, he crushed the *louse* but the *flea* jumped away.

Then the tiger set out to trace the trail of his wife and asked everyone he met on the way, but all replied to him that they had not seen her, till at last, he came to the *magnolia* (a creeper), who said she had just gone by that way. He traced her till he came up with her at dusk at the door of her parents' house. The woman cried out, "Mother, come out of the inner room and open the door,"² but the mother did not. Because of her mother's reluctance she had to meet her fateful death.

This folktale draws attention to social aspects to have sound teachings in marital life as well as to enslave human rights concerns for a better humanity. The immediate context of this story shows that once upon a time human being lived their daily lives along with nature and animals as a big family. It was said that they lived in harmony, understanding along with action and expression as a mode of communication. It was also believed that all nature and

even animals have reasoning power; as a result, this story came into existence in the Lotha Naga folktale.

III. REFLECTIONS AND MORAL TEACHINGS

According to the traditions of our fore-parents, this story dates back to their early life before humans departed from plants and animals. This legend carries weight in the discipline of the social picture of unsound marital life. The tears of her parents indicate the suffering and the death of their daughter at the hands of a cruel husband. When we reflect upon this story we also see the interrogative aspect as who is responsible for the children? And how do parents decide for their children?

IV. RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

Violation of human rights is not wise for it attached great importance to the protection of life and personal liberty to an individual and emphasizes respect for human dignity.³ This does not mean that even today the Lotha Nagas follow the same trends and traditions of our fore-parents' wrong teachings even though it is against individual liberty and social life. But there are some people in pockets in some of the villages and in the towns of Lotha area that treat their spouse (including his kit and kin) inhumanly. As Spinoza writes, "hatred which is entirely conquered by love passes into love, and love on that account is greater than if it had not been preceded by hatred."⁴ Our present generation should reflect more that human beings are creatures of the Creator with a commitment and responsibility.

V. STRUGGLE BETWEEN SURVIVAL AND CHOICE

The character of the Tiger can also be seen metaphorically as a cruel husband, an ungodly man, and not approachable, aggressive and possessive person. The tiger's intention to kill his innocent wife who needed help signifies his evil possessive attitude. The unwise decision of parents led to doom. The character of the uncomforted and nonnegotiable husband gives us a lesson to reflect on our ego world. Looking at the whims of the world, often some parents make wrong decisions without considering what reality the future will offer for their children. Love must rule over all nature and creation.

¹ It is said by our Fore-parents that when these two insects, *louse* and *flea* meet together, they make a sound like *chuck, chuck*. The tiger also did not follow her this time with an implication that she would take bath and it is not good to follow her at this time.

² In the olden days, the houses Of the Lothas have several chambers; (A). Outer Room (mpongki), (B). Steps, (C). Small landing, (D). Third Wife Room (tuhruui), (E). Chief Wife Room (Olongo), (F). Second Wife Room (tachungo), (G). Store Room (bhurindung), (H). Platform (Khantsung). See also Mills, *The Lotha Naga*, 32.

³ Mamta Rajawat, *Burning Issues of Human Rights* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2001), 268.

⁴ Quoted by B.L. Manocha, in *Marriage Conflicts Cause and Cure* (New Delhi: Gahlot Printers, 1983), 146-147.

VI. IDENTIFYING HUMAN VALUES

About the woman as a victim of both her parents' decision and the tiger's dominance, our ancestors' saying goes, "If one is married to a wrong husband or wife, it is like a small stone inside your shoes that keep on disturbing you the whole day as you wear." Despite her inquisitive mode towards her parents, they deny her rights to human values for which she becomes an innocent victim. She takes all the pain and sorrow due to her parents' unwise decision to experience hell on earth.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE FROM THE FOLKTALE OF A GIRL WHO MARRIED TO A TIGER

An immense contribution has been given to the socio-political life of the Lotha Nagas from the folktale of a "Girl who married a tiger." For which its significance as a human and as a creature having equal rights will be seen here.

VIII. HUMAN RIGHTS AND OTHER CREATURES' RIGHTS AS THE RELIC OF SOCIETY

As an illumination from the folktale of "Girl who married a Tiger," it is believed to have taken place in those days when they were very much attached to animals and nature. When the world was in such a state, the tiger got the promise from the pregnant woman irrespective of their "being."⁵ The message of the fore-parents in those days reflects the value of life where everyone was understood as creatures of the Creator, for which one should enjoy equal human rights irrespective of male and female and even animals and nature because they are all co-related.⁶ Their

worldview seems to be friendlier than ours. They valued life as indispensable to nature and creatures, keeping their distinctiveness.⁷ Their understanding of life seems to be very optimistic. That is why even if they get a small number of wild animals from their hunting, they even give them to those dogs that go hunting along with them.⁸ Thus, it is retainable that the traditional worldview has an inclusive cosmic communitarian right emphasis.

IX. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the researcher intends to infuse the need to cultivate and develop an approach towards the revitalization of the neglected and even abandoned moral teachings as found in the mentioned folktale. Folktales and folklores are not only important but effective in the presentation of moral values. It unquestionably carries cultural implication and moral reflection to a particular historical setting and that must be made meaningful to the contemporary context of the people. Such a rethinking process will help us to enhance our moral values, understanding, and relationship with humans and nature and the world at large.

As stated by G.N.Devy, the space of the tribal's is sacred rather than secular. The Lotha Nagas knew only a communitarian life, ready to extend help to the needy, destitute, aged, and strangers. As also stated by Nungshitula, they have the willingness to share their belongings with neighbors and friends who are in need. They are hospitable to the ones who deserved it, they show respect to elders and parents and avoid Stealing and

⁵ Sutherland, *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 50. "Being" refers to the state of being authentic, genuine and real. It is an existentialist expression referring to the individual's authentic experience of himself, others, and the world, actualizing himself; it is not yet known how to discriminate between what is authentic and what is not.

⁶ This does not mean that they don't kill each other and they don't eat any flesh which has blood. They eat and kill with a purpose. If the enemy comes to attack them, they need to protect themselves from danger for their safety. Many researchers and writers on Nagas took for granted that they are head hunters who chop somebody's head without any reason. But this is a wrong conception. They respect life in many ways; they live together with domestic animals; they eat with them, sleep with them, and go hunting together. This shows enough evidence that they depend on one another in their daily life. In other words, they are indispensable to each other. See also Vanlalchuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernization in Mizoram* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 31. The writer in this statement argued taking a

statement from Shakespeare's analysis about Lewin's rendering of Lushai as a "decapitator" may suffice to indicate the socio-cultural implication and said; I believed that as far as the Lushais and their kindred clan are a concern, head-hunting was not indulged in. By this, I mean that parties did not go out simply to get heads. Of course, a man[sic] who had killed his man[sic] was thought more highly of than one who had not, and therefore, when a man[sic] did kill a person he[sic] was speaking the truth; but the raids were not made to get heads, but for loot and slaves. The killing and taking of heads were merely incidents in the raids, not the cause of it.

⁷ For further and clearer reference see A. Wati Longchar, "Christianity among the Nagas" in *Christianity in India: Search for Liberation and Identity*, edited by F. Hrangkhuma (New Delhi: CMS/ISPCK, 1998), 260-263.

⁸ This practice is still seen in the villages where modernity had less effect. And by giving the share of the animals hunted to the dogs involved in the hunting shows the acknowledgment that it has an owner, thus, that very sharing point to respecting the ownership right of the dog which is an indispensable part of human rights. Interview with Lt.Mhonbemo Tungoe, Wokha village, 2019.

cheating.⁹ Unfortunately, all these heritages are fading away with the coming of modernization.

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⁹ Nungshitula, *The Naga Image of Human Being: A Resource for a Contemporary Theological Anthropology* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2001), 54-55.